



# SCI&D SPIRIT

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CATCH the SPIRIT

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
VA Boston Healthcare System  
Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders

## Getting Back on the Tractor Again



Picture above left to right: Larry Favreau with his SCI physician, Dr. Hess, and his wife, Terry Favreau

On May 17, 2013, Lawrence (Larry) Favreau, a 68 year old Army Veteran, injured his neck when he fell from a tractor on his farm and sustained an incomplete C2 spinal cord injury.

Larry made good progress with his initial treatment and rehabilitation in

community hospitals. However, when his stay there came to an end, his Spinal Cord injury (SCI) physician, who had trained at VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS), suggested that Larry may get additional benefit from continuing his care at VABHS.

Larry's wife, Terry, toured the VABHS SCI Center in West Roxbury prior to making a decision. They were not sure that it would help, but the couple agreed to a very brief stay for assessment. They expected to stay for three days, but as Larry continued to make significant gains, three days turned into six weeks.

Under the care of Dr. Marika Hess, Larry's rehabilitation progressed even more. He commented *"Dr. Hess always suggested things in such a nice way, I just did them."*

Larry and Terry were very impressed with the therapy received during his stay at VABHS stating that "Once assessed by the team, the therapy never stopped." Larry

enjoyed the Recreation Therapy Program. He participated in pool therapy, community outings, and group activities such as Wii Game nights and Trivial Pursuit lunch groups.

The Favreaus live over 50 miles from the VABHS SCI Center. The ability to stay at Fisher House on the West Roxbury campus allowed Terry to be a partner in Larry's rehabilitation. As a nurse, Terry valued the interdisciplinary team approach he received commenting that *"The medical team provided the knowledge, the caregivers and family provided love and support, and the patient provided the determination to succeed."*

Prior to his injury, Larry worked the farm that has been in his family for many generations. He was motivated to work hard in rehabilitation to return to the work he loved.

On discharge from the VA, Larry was referred to VA BHS SCI Homecare. For five months, the SCI Homecare nurse and social worker assisted the couple with managing Larry's personal care needs, new medications, access to community and VA resources as well as providing encouragement and emotional support along the way.

Today, Larry is back on his tractor, baling hay, caring for his cows, and managing his septic system business



Pictured above: Larry Favreau, back on his tractor

## Promoting SCI Education & Training

At VA Boston Health Care System, we are lucky to have staff who are experts in their fields. A key goal of our SCI Center is to increase the knowledge of health care professionals and trainees in SCI care.

We are the main training site for the Harvard Medical School SCI fellowship program. We train residents from multiple programs, nursing students, social work interns, therapy students, and psychology interns and fellows. Our staff present on diverse SCI-related topics at national SCI conferences, as illustrated by the blurb on page 3. We also host our own annual SCI symposia and multidisciplinary SCI conferences for VA and community providers and trainees. Our staff publish books, book chapters, and other educational material.

These initiatives not only help with spreading knowledge about SCI, they also motivate us to keep learning and up to date!



Sunil Sabharwal, MD  
Chief SCI/D Services

## Waves for the Brave



Veteran Roland Filion riding the waves

Waves for the Brave was started in 2010 by VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS) in collaboration with a local surf shop in Scituate. The program was modeled after successful West Coast VA surf programs that provide instruction in adaptive surfing to Veterans with disabilities.

Since then, two to four adaptive surf camps are offered each summer on Nantasket Beach in Hull to Veterans with spinal cord injury, amputation, MS, brain injury, PTSD, vision loss, stroke and many other impairments. Professional surf instructors from local surf shops partner with certified adaptive surf instructors and trained volunteers to provide Veterans with instruction in how to experience the “stoke” of surfing. Many of the adaptive surf instructors and trained volunteers are VABHS employees.

Some Veterans do not require anything more than a wet suit, a surf board and some instruction, while others use special adaptive equipment including larger boards and postural supports. Apart from individuals who require mechanical assistance for breathing, there is not a disability that cannot be accommodated on a surf board.

## Care Beyond the Hospital

SCI Homecare is a division within the VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS) Spinal Cord Injury Service. It is made up of an interdisciplinary team that follows eligible Veterans with SCI/D in their home.

Veterans with SCI/D are usually referred to SCI Homecare after initial injury, a significant change in health or functional decline for a limited period of time. Veterans with SCI/D, who are admitted to a skilled nursing facility, are followed for the duration of their stay at the facility. Veterans on SCI Homecare must live within a 100-mile radius of VABHS, live in an environment that is suitable or adaptable for daily care in the home and agree with treatment plans.

The SCI Homecare team at VABHS has expanded over the past few years. In addition to two nurses and a social worker, a physical therapist, psychologist and vocational rehab specialist have been added. Team members provide assessment, education and emotional support to patients, caregivers and home health aides. After an initial in-home visit, some follow-up visits can be offered using Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT). This allows SCI providers outside of the Homecare Team to participate in visits as needed. Last fiscal year, the team provided education and support to over 100 Veterans and their families.

The members of the SCI Homecare team enjoy their “work on the road”. In their own environments, Veterans and caregivers are usually more comfortable and find it easier to communicate with providers.

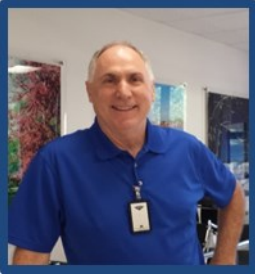
## SCI Staff Accepts the Challenge



Bonnie Russell, nurse manager of the SCI inpatient unit challenged her SCI colleagues to take the ice bucket challenge in support of ALS research. On Wednesday, August 13th, a group of SCI staff including nurses, dietician, administrative staff and SCI Chief Dr. Sabharwal spent their lunch break braving the rain and accepting her challenge by pouring ice water over their heads.



## Staff Updates and Congratulations



Jeff Dawes, KT



Elizabeth Auld, PA-C



Jeanine Penzo, LICSW



Nancy Brooks, RN



Maggi Budd, Ph.D.

- Jeff Dawes, SCI Kinesiotherapist, retired after 35+ years of service at the VA, most of those in SCI.
- Elizabeth Auld, SCI Physician Assistant, was presented with the Michael E. Cummings Volunteer Award by the National MS Society, Connecticut Chapter. Elizabeth retired after 20.5 years of service with the VA.
- Jeanine Penzo, SCI Social Worker, received the PVA Advocacy-Clinical Excellence Award in Social Work at the PVA national conference.
- Nancy Brooks, SCI Case Manager, obtained special certification in Gerontological Nursing.
- Maggi Budd, SCI Psychologist, received the 2014 Early Career Practice Award from the American Psychological Association-Rehabilitation Psychology Division.

## Sharing the Knowledge

Several SCI staff members were selected to share their unique knowledge with other SCI professionals at two back-to-back national SCI conferences held this summer, and received excellent feedback from attendees.

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) 2014 Summit was held in Las Vegas, NV.

- Kysa Christie, PhD, & Jeanine Penzo, MSW, LICSW, presented a thoughtful symposium on “If a caregiver is burdened, is the patient a burden?”.
- Ms. Penzo also spoke on “Providing effective patient care when personalities intervene”.

The Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals (ASCIP) conference was held in St. Louis, MO.

- Tracey Presley, MSW, LICSW, Marika Hess, MD, and Kysa Christie, PhD presented a patient-centered and team approach to “Caring for the dying patient”
- Margaret Budd, PhD hosted a session on “Research networking and grant writing workshop”.
- Sunil Sabharwal, MD, presented research on “Cardiac risk factors in Veterans with SCI”, a “Point-Counterpoint” session on controversial issues in SCI, and a session on “Educational technologies to keep up with SCI literature”

## Caregiver Corner

## Caregiver Resources and Contacts

For the past three years our “Caregiver Corner” has provided tips and reminders to Veterans and their caregivers regarding the importance of self-care for caregivers.

We are retiring our “Caregiver Corner” for now. However, we continue to recognize the pivotal role that caregivers have in the lives of Veterans with SCI/D and encourage you to use the following resources and contacts:

Telephone Caregiver Support Groups and In-Home Respite: Jeanine Penzo, LICSW-857-203-6498

Inpatient Respite for veterans with SCI/D: Courtney Dos Santos, LICSW-774-826-1809

Inpatient respite for Veterans with SCD involving MS or ALS: Joan Morley Driscoll, LICSW-774-826-2858





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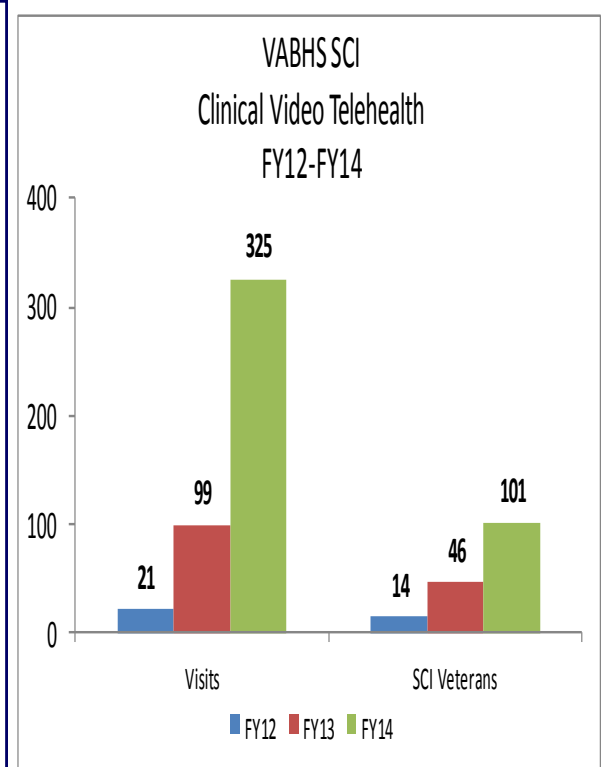
Veteran Veteran  
1 Veteran Way  
Boston, MA 02122

## Increasing Virtual Access via Video Telehealth

Two years ago VA Boston Health Care System (VABHS) began offering Veterans with spinal cord injury and disorders (SCI/D) additional ways to connect with us. These include clinical video telehealth (CVT) visits in the home (home telehealth) as well as real-time visits for patients in the clinic to meet via video with specialists at another location.

The graph on the right shows the growth of our telehealth program over this period. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, more than 100 Veterans with SCI used this service at Boston. The number of SCI telehealth visits jumped from 21 in FY2012 to 325 in FY2014.

Our Veterans have been using Video Telehealth for a number of reasons. Including Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) for pain management without leaving home, support during transition to home after initial rehabilitation, home accessibility assessment by therapists, wound care management without traveling to the Center, vocational rehabilitation counseling, meeting with a pharmacist to go over medications, or doing a “team meeting” with providers at different locations. One Veteran even did a team meeting, while at our SCI Center, with a team of staff at the SCI Center in San Juan before returning home to Puerto Rico for the first time since his injury 20 years ago. The possibilities are almost endless, and, given the value this service seems to be providing, we look forward to expanding these programs further to even better serve our Veterans.



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